

ON THE FESTIVALS AND FOLKLORE OF GILGIT.

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V.

THE CEREMONY OF NAGI SUCHEMI.

Nagi Suchemi is said to be a goddess who lived at Nangam in the Astore district, on a stone altar situated at the foot of the Nagishi hill. In former times cases of theft requiring settlement by oath were decided by the defendant's swearing on this sacred platform in the following manner. A man called Jungmi was specially appointed by the Rá to accompany the defendant to the place, receiving eight yards of cloth from the suspected person. A she-goat was killed on the altar and the meat cooked and eaten by all those present; in utensils which were always kept and are still kept there. The defendant had now to utter the following words loudly: "O Nagi Sochemi, inflict punishment upon me if I am guilty of the crime, but, if the plaintiff has laid a false claim upon me, be so kind as to inflict a calamity on him!" They then returned quietly to their homes in the darkness of night. None of the men who had attended this solemnity were allowed to appear in daylight before others of the village, and if by chance one of them showed himself to any villager, he had to repay whatever loss there arose from the theft, or from any untoward circumstance happening to the discoverer of the offending juryman at dawn of that day. For some days the case was left awaiting the decision of "Nagi Sochemi," and if in this period the suspected person suffered any kind of loss of property, of relatives, etc., he was adjudged guilty, and the total amount of loss by the theft was recovered from him and repaid to the plaintiff.

"KHURAN" OR "MAJARI."

In Chilas and in the adjacent valleys of Jalkot, Palas, Koli, Darel, Tangir, Gor, Harban, and Sazin, the disputes between two individuals or parties are settled by a peculiar ceremony called "Khuran" in Shinaki (Chilas, Darel, Tangir, Gor, Harban and Sazin), and "Majari" in Kohistan (Jalkot, Palas, and Koli). By this ceremony each of the opposite parties has to prove itself wealthier than the other, and whichever proves to be the poorer is forced to submit to the other. The ceremony is performed by each party giving food to all the villagers at a place called "Kai." Whichever party provides the larger feast gains the day, while the other must needs submit.

VI.

DANYALS.

There are some men and women of these parts who are called Danyals. When they are worked up into a state of frenzy the giants and fairies instruct them concerning the future of the country, the chiefs, etc. Whenever a chief is inquisitive on the subject of his future, he sends for the Danyals as well as the local musicians. A bundle of green chili leaves is then brought, and some of these, with a little *ghi*, are put into a small fire and burnt in an enclosure set apart for the purpose. As soon as the smoke rises, one or two Danyals push their way towards the fire and begin to inhale the smoke, until

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before he has had time to confide the secret of their hiding place to his son. The practice is entirely confined to the Shins, who have many legends of lost treasures which have fallen under the guardianship of demons.

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In both Chilas and Darel, a practice exists of storing clarified butter in cellars for a great number of years. It turns deep red and keeps for more than a hundred years, when it is much prized. A tree is sometimes planted over the cellar to ensure its not being disturbed, and wealth is computed by the amount of butter stored up. On one occasion a deputation came to me from Darel to ask that some run-away slaves should be compelled to say where they had buried their master's butter, as they alone knew the secret.

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Wine, which at one time was universally drunk, is also placed in flagged underground cellars to ripen in large earthen jars, but is never kept more than a year. In digging the foundations of my house at Gilgit, I came on one of these old cellars with two large jars in it, which had evidently been undisturbed for many years. The drinking of wine has much diminished under Islam, and where still practised is concealed as much as possible, except in Hunza and Ponyal, where public jollifications are not uncommon. The Maulai sect make no secret of the practice, and on my visit to Hunza, in 1876, a bottle of Scotch whiskey made Ghazan Khan so gloriously drunk that all Hunza spoke of it with admiration.

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Polo-playing, of which so complete an account has been given by Mr. Drew, is the national game. Dardistan play, however, lacks the neatness of the Munnipoori game; but what is wanting in style is quite made up in enthusiasm, old men joining in the game as long as they are able to sit on a horse. Matches are generally played for some small stake, and the conquerors exact all the rights of victory by taunting their beaten opponents. In Chitral the game, which is called "ghal," is played somewhat differently from the way described by Mr. Drew. Aman-ool-mulk, the present ruler of Chitral, was said to be the best player in the country when a young man.

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The game is quite unknown in Badakhshan, where "buz-kushi," or "goat-snatching," is the favourite amusement. The following description of this game as played by the Kirghiz is given by Shaw,¹ under the name of "Ooghlak:—"

"The headless body of a goat is thrown on the ground, and every one tries to pick it up without leaving the saddle. The press is tremen-

¹ Shaw's High Tartary, Yarkand and Kashgar.

000 We tried to find our fairy-visiting friend in one of the Owir hamlets, but failed, I forget why.

556 Next day we crossed into another valley, and
567 halted for breakfast at a place called Barun, the residence of a headman whose ancestors had been kings of this collection of valleys. He was a rich man, the possessor of over three hundred slaves.

133 All the four valleys of the Owir district are of the same type, and are remarkable for the outcrop of saltpetre, which reduces the soil available for cultivation. The Owir stream is formed by the junction of the waters from the four valleys, and runs out finally into the Chitral river, through the narrow gorge described above, up which no man can force his way. The march beyond Barun was terribly severe, in and out of a succession of steep ravines hundreds of feet deep, the last ascent of a thousand feet, up which our horses barely carried us, landing us on the watershed between the Owir and the Mastuj valley. The view back was indescribably grand, we were told: unfortunately for us, Tirich Mir veiled his face. Still it was very fine, a grand circle of snow-clad mountains fencing the valley, which is broken by the four main streams into a series of long promontories, the upper and flatter part of the amphitheatre one mass of cultivation and autumn colouring. After descending a few hundred feet the road turned north, and the view was again lovely; at one's feet the great gently sloping circle of the Lun valley cultivation, and in the distance the Mastuj, Turikho, and Murikho valleys.

The Lun valley is a replica of the Owir; Turikho